

Reflective Practice for Professional Development: A Preliminary Consideration of What We Can Learn about Teaching from Movies about Teachers

Ian NAKAMURA

Abstract

This exploratory study will begin with a review of cinematic portrayals of teachers and their situations by establishing three categories: thought-provoking stories of teachers and students trying to overcome social barriers, entertainment first productions with an uplifting resolution of conflict, and documentaries that track the real-life struggles and successes of educational practitioners and their students through project-based training and performance. Then I will use forms of reflective practice and discourse analysis to delve deeper into the details of teaching and context. This working paper will conclude with some thoughts on what ‘good’ teachers do.

Key words: films, reflection, teachers, students, professional development

If we focus on the kinds of reflection-in-action through which practitioners sometimes make new sense of uncertain, unique or conflicted situations of practice, then we will assume neither that existing professional knowledge fits every case nor that every problem has a right answer.

(Donald Schön, 1987, p. 39)

I . Introduction: Connecting the real world with the cinematic world

While going to the movies may conjure up memories of going out with friends for entertainment, some people (e.g., students of films) go to movies to learn something new about life (i.e., the human condition). Others may follow an ‘intellectual’ tradition of having a passionate argument about social or political issues raised in a film. In a similar ‘academic’ light, I argue that observing ‘film’ of cinematic performances is not so different from going into a classroom and collecting data through observation schedules (i.e., checklists), field notes, peer observations (with follow up discussions), video and audio recordings (to be transcribed and analyzed), reflective journals, and post-class interviews and questionnaires in terms of usability of records for closer study.

One strength as a research resource in examining details of teachers-in-action that occur in films is the actions and interactions are publicly available for repeated (high quality) viewing by anyone, anywhere, and anytime. This is truly sharable data for educational purpose. In fact, one of the most prized qualities of a ‘good’ movie is that it provides the viewers with a shared

experience that leaves a lasting impression. We often make passing reference to memorable characters and even quote what they say. In this sense, movies are not only a type of shared resource of experience and insight, but also a project designed to engage participants not just now, but in the future. Affiliation is established through signs of mutual understanding. Isn't this the very thing teachers try to do?

The purpose of this working paper is not to argue that cinematic portrayals are realistic or 'naturally occurring'. Far from it, the scenes are certainly scripted and rehearsed. What I am concerned with here is whether cinematic representations are credible and if they can help us think about teaching.

While these performances are staged and directed, a similar case could be made that any event once positioned in front of a camera is no longer the same naturally occurring event. Particularly in this age of critical sensitivities where we are seen as social actors carrying out various types of discourse and institutional practices and where researchers increasingly need detailed participant consent forms (that explain the purpose and use of the recording in advance), it could be argued that recordings of research subjects are similarly self-consciously enacted.

My main point is: some films move us and potentially influence the way we see society and how we interact in it. Such a moment can lead to further thought and discussion (as in this paper). Records of how others teach regardless of the source (e.g., Hollywood made movies, TV documentaries, research or pedagogically motivated recordings) have the potential to inform and possibly inspire our beliefs, practices, and goals about teaching. If we have been fortunate as students, we have had teachers who have made a difference in our professional lives. If we have also been fortunate as movie viewers, we have encountered cinematic portrayals of teachers that have shaped our vision of the teacher we strive to be.

II. Reflective explorations: Making sense of cinematic details in different ways

I will now look deeper at some details of a few movies. The analysis and discussion to follow will draw attention to observable qualities that could impact teacher development. How teachers (in the local contexts they find themselves in) try to engage students in understanding and applying new knowledge and skills is a question that movies should be able to supply some interesting answers to. Movies about teachers despite being scripted and staged may actually contribute to our understanding of what teachers do by providing some 'objective' distance between us and our teaching situations. We have a chance to stand outside ourselves and more objectively observe and reflect on the actions and interactions captured on film.

Reflection no. 1: A student of film

In this first form of reflective exploration, I will use a 'narrative' approach adopted from models by Kathleen Bailey (1990) on diary/journal studies and Elliot Mishler (1999) on life histories. My account will try to explain how I came to use movies as a resource for learning.

Films have always played a part in my formal education. First, I took film courses when I was an undergraduate student in art at the University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB),

just up the freeway from Los Angeles and Hollywood. Films such as *The Bicycle Thief* and *8½* were watched and then discussed in detail not only for cinematic achievement, but more importantly for how characters were represented and the social issues raised. This particular course on Post-War Italian Cinema as well as other courses such as an Introduction to Films and Films by Kurosawa were taught by former film critics. Much more recently during my study leave in England (see Nakamura, 2012, for details), I joined the monthly political club movie nights where films dealing with specific social issues in local contexts were watched and discussed afterward with a professor from the department. Two memorable sessions featured *Made in Dagenham* (2010) about equal pay for equal work for women working in a textile factory in England and *Land and Freedom* (1995) by Ken Loach on land reformation struggles during the Spanish Civil War and the British volunteers who went there to join the local resistance.

Then in my MA teacher-training program at the School for International Training (SIT), Vermont, we watched the movie, *Teachers* (1984, starring Nick Nolte), and critiqued the portrayals of the various teachers in a high school. The characters and classroom situations ranged from one teacher spending all his time trying to keep students 'under control' to another teacher explaining a point through a practical hands-on demonstration rather than through a lecture or a textbook. We used both commercially made movies and instructional films of teachers teaching to observe specific approaches and methods (see Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, for the approaches we studied). Our graduation independent project was based on analysis of our own video recordings of us teaching our students. In all cases, we examined features of teacher-student interactions in terms of teacher-initiated actions, feedback from students, and teachers' responses to the feedback.

Summary of what was learned

Studying movies for what we can learn about teaching (and learning) is a logical extension and application of what we read in books and hear in lectures. Film in one form or another is all around us and even more so today with 'YouTube'. Virtually every aspect of our lives is visualized and accessible through the internet. Not only social networking through 'Facebook' is common, but also 'breaking down film' professionally to analyze past performances, whether they are athletes or surgeons, is now an essential part of training and continuous professional development. Yet how many language teachers do any kind of continuous professional development, let alone study film?

Reflection no. 2: Categorizing movies

In a second form of the reflective gathering of ideas, I will paint a broad landscape of movies by describing, interpreting, and categorizing the characters and their struggles. This is a common approach taken by film critics such as Roger Ebert (see Acknowledgment for more information) and my teachers at UCSB. 'Films' will be discussed in three categories (using the Academy Awards' definition that also includes documentaries).

The first type is serious, thought-provoking, and even controversial. These films focus on the

teacher as the central character who makes an impression on both the students and the viewers by facing familiar timeless and unresolved issues in education (e.g., institutional control vs. teacher/student freedom, passing tests vs. pursuing dreams, and overcoming restrictions and harassment by gender, age, class, and race). Examples of films in this category include: *Dead Poets Society*, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, *Educating Rita*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Billy Elliot*, and *Finding Forrester*. Within this genre of raising social consciousness and advocating changes of attitude and policy, we see the hero or heroine follow ‘the path less traveled’. Some of these movies have big name actors (e.g., Robin Williams, Maggie Smith, Michael Caine, and Sean Connery) and well-respected directors like Peter Weir and Gus van Sant. Their directorial insights into American culture and education are fresh and thought-provoking. These movies are comparably ‘small’ scale/low-key productions.

Two subtypes can be distinguished by the consequences for the students in following the teacher’s beliefs and actions: tragic endings, particularly for the smitten student (in the first two movies listed above) and happier and inspirational conclusions (in the last four movies mentioned). In the latter case, the teacher receives life confirmation or validation that his/her efforts helped the other protagonist (the student) triumph over institutional, social, and personal barriers. A brighter future lies ahead for the student, unlike in the tragic ending type film of the former case, where denial, alienation, and even death occur. These are rare movies that leave viewers on their own to ponder what went wrong. We learn that there are consequences when teachers fail to fully understand the power of their words and what students are capable of doing as a result. We are left with the feeling that the teacher is either ahead of their time or has been passed by as in *Dead Poets Society* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, respectively.

A second category includes more obviously Hollywood oriented and driven films aimed at a broad audience from children to adults. Here the classroom is the familiar stage. After all, we were all once students. We can relate to timeless and borderless situations where teachers and students struggle with each other and within themselves in search of understanding, respect, and purpose. This search for meaning and relevance (i.e., Why are we here?) is similar to the first category of ‘serious’ movies, but with one difference. The outcome here is more predictable. It appears that the target audience is perceived by the producers to be wanting to be entertained more than wanting to think.

With predominately happy endings in this second category (with arguably some overlap with the first category), we see not only reconciliation through honesty and hard work, but also the recognition and establishment of shared values and goals between formerly conflicting parties (e.g., inner city gang members and a new teacher of a different race or education obsessed parents and a struggling musician posing as a substitute teacher). Examples of such entertaining and uplifting (i.e., feel good) films are *To Sir, with Love* and *School of Rock*. In a typical Hollywood story, the problem gets resolved (often too neatly). Nevertheless, there are some actions for teachers to reflect upon: What do ‘good’ teachers do (or don’t do)? This question will be taken up later in more detail.

A third and final category is a hybrid of sorts, documentaries about a ‘real’ teacher in a ‘real’

situation. In documentaries about teachers and language education, there is the local example of the then junior high school English teacher in Matsue, Goro Tajiri, whose teaching was documented on the popular NHK show, *The Professional*. He gave a special public lecture at Okada several years ago and explained the making of the show. While the lessons were 'real' there was a professional camera crew filming the students not only during class, but also at other times and locations around the school and town. Camera, lighting, and sound equipment crew and staff set up ahead of time. Thus, there was a constant reminder to teacher and students that they were on film and would eventually be seen on national TV.

It is hard to know exactly how much rehearsing and editing was done, but certainly scenes were selected, combined, and cut to create a certain vision which fit the program profile of 'professionals' who are highly trained, experienced, and most of all, recognizably successful. 'Staging' scenes and even doing multiple takes do not dampen our belief in their excellence. In person, Tajiri Sensei's sense of purpose and dedication to the success of his students' learning is impressive. In the same genre is the celebrated French documentary, *Être et Avoir*, about a teacher in rural school in France where all ages study together in the same classroom as in the classic American family TV show, *Little House on the Prairie*, based on the books by Laura Wilder.

Sometimes it is good to be reminded that issues in education, quality of teaching, and learning opportunities are not limited to EFL classrooms. Teachers and students across a wide range of disciplines, skills, and professions encounter and struggle with the same trials and tribulations. We all strive to be the kind of teacher who makes a difference. Here I am thinking of two popular British TV documentary series which follow Jamie Oliver (a chef) in *Jamie's Kitchen* and Gareth Malone (a chorus director) in *The Choir*.

Jamie Oliver takes on the challenge of training students to be cooks by the time his first restaurant opens. Gareth Malone takes on the challenge of getting a community of citizens ready to sing at a local music festival. Of course, we may say that their reputation precedes them and there is little chance of failure. It is true that broadcasting companies let alone the audience would not be interested in a project that went horribly wrong. However, the obstacles they encounter and eventually overcome (to a certain degree) are real. In addition, the participants in 'The Choir' are 'ordinary' citizens with no special singing talent or training, just a lot of desire to succeed. In 'Jamie's Kitchen', the students were former school dropouts, again not with any special skill. The stories actually turn out to be about character building more than the professional quality of their final performances.

The documented series of temporary setbacks serve as stepping stones on the way to success. This is something both teachers and students need to be reminded of from time to time. 'Success' is not immediate or guaranteed, let alone predictable. This concrete realization of accomplishing a goal step by step through tangible and assessable actions (often by taking one step back and before taking two steps forward) draws attention to the importance of establishing and maintaining a clear purpose before anything else. Forming and following regular work routines which are monitored and guided by the expert is a key to progress and eventual readiness to perform. 'Success' is clearly linked to self-transformation through hard

work and conviction over time.

Summary of what was learned

In the end, it may not be an overwhelming performance that grabs our attention, but rather the modest steps taken that show just how far the characters have progressed and the ensuing self-satisfaction and pride felt by simply making a commitment and honoring it. What makes these particular dramas educational as well as suspenseful is the unpredictability of the outcome. What actually happens to the characters? Even if they succeed, will their accomplishment be but a fleeting moment or will it be a lasting change?

Teaching in these movies basically consists of more than the delivery or transmission of predetermined knowledge. There is an implied need for teachers and students to communicate and co-accomplish learning and teaching through mutual understanding and respect. Learning and teaching are not only cognitive processes, but also social ones. Certain moments in teaching illuminate our view of life and raise possibilities of how we might contribute to it. 'It' includes the lives of others as well as our own. We may see 'teachable moments' more clearly as viewers of others' teaching (and learning) rather than as analysts/critics of our own teaching.

Reflection no. 3: Through the eyes of the participants

In a third form of reflective practice, I will compare different points of views in *School of Rock* and *Dead Poets Society* based on a model introduced by Claire Stanley in a workshop at TESOL 2000 at Vancouver and in a School for International Training(SIT) online course on Reflective Practice of classroom teaching. With a similar opinion, Allwright and Bailey (1990) believe the varying perspectives and concerns of students, teachers, and administrators all need to be taken into account. Exploratory study into the quality of social life in classrooms starts with understanding features of the local context. Following this notion, movies will be seen from three perspectives with the addition of one more: teachers, students, administrators, *and* directors.

(1)The teacher's view according to the beliefs and actions of Dewey in *School of Rock* and Mr. Keating in *Dead Poets Society*.

Dewey simply at first *wants* musicians for his rock band so he can enter a contest. Mr. Keating *wants* his students to become free thinkers, to 'seize the day', and to make unique contributions to society. The dominant feature is soon established: the teacher's purpose/vision and the students' role/participation in it.

(2)A student's view of the new teacher, Zack in *School of Rock* and Neil in *Dead Poets Society*.

Zack listens, follows the teacher's advice, and imitates his actions, but without full commitment. He is weighing what his father tells him to do (e.g., stop playing rock music) and what his teacher is saying (play even harder) which are at odds. Neil, similarly but more

overtly, is entranced by his teacher's words and action (live for today, try acting) and pays less and less attention to his father's rules (sacrifice today for tomorrow's success, all that matters is getting good grades) which are also diametrically opposed. Teachers may complicate students' lives when there is a gap between the status quo and the new idea.

(3) The administration's view represented by the beliefs of the two principals, Miss Mullins in *School of Rock* and Mr. Nolan in *Dead Poets Society*.

Miss 'Roz' Mullins is very self-conscious, easily intimidated, and completely overwhelmed by the (rich and educated) parents with their expectations for their children's academic success. 'Education' to them means going to a good university in the future. The parents at this elite school, Horace Green Elementary School, are obsessed with their own vision and definition of 'success'. The school is a 'preparatory' school like Wellington Academy in *Dead Poets Society*. Strikingly similar old, cold, and damp stone buildings remind us of their impenetrability and permanence. Mr. Nolan like Miss Mullins but with greater conviction (and more years of fossilization) adheres to the 'tried and true' method of training students to enter the 'Ivy League' universities (e.g., Harvard, Yale). He believes tradition at all cost guarantees what the parents call 'success'. To the parents in both movies, it means their children should obediently follow in their footsteps into banking, medicine, and law (with gratitude for all the sacrifices made on their behalf). After all, it is in their best interest.

Ironically, there are occasions when both principals fondly recall when they *were* teachers. They realize with some regret that they have changed. They traded in concerns for the students' well-being for obsession with test scores and grades. The school depends on the satisfaction of the parents through the students' high test scores to maintain the school's reputation and continuing tradition. It is never said, but rather it is implied that 'education' has a business consideration for customer satisfaction.

(4) The directors' beliefs, Peter Weir (*Dead Poets Society*) and Richard Linklater (*School of Rock*), are displayed by the situations they set up, the characters' actions, and the underlying message.

Both directors claim there is a better way than the status quo which sacrifices creativity for prescribed knowledge. The status quo as both movies open is based on the assumption that the 'school' knows best (what parents want and what children need). There is little room to find one's 'element' (see Robinson, 2012) or calling in life. In contrast, both directors, through the voice of the new teacher, argue that students need time, space, and opportunity to discover their own interests and talents. The common underlying message is humans are in conflict between following what we *should* do and what we *want* to do. Students represent this dilemma and the teachers offer a choice, but with some caution.

The directors are not naïve. They are like McAllister in *Dead Poets Society*, 'sympathetic realists'. Weir warns us of the risk of 'seizing the day' when we go all out without a safety net

while Linklater plays it safer (within a comedy) by advocating there is a time and place for both the practical (good grades) and the creative (rock band *after* school).

Summary of what was learned

Looking at things from a single point of view may make decision-making much simpler. However, following what we think is 'right' according to established and often unquestioned beliefs and values may cause us to ignore the longer term repercussions of not thinking deeper or wider. When we expand the number of perspectives considered different sets of benefits and costs emerge. Choices are no longer clear cut choices in black and white, but rather in shades of gray. What is 'success?' Is it high test scores? Whose success is it? Who benefits, the student, teacher, parent, or principal? What comes to the foreground is a critical issue of whether students and society are better served through massive input of knowledge or varied and numerous opportunities for students to find and develop their creativity. Robinson (2012) would argue knowledge alone will not equip students for what they need to know and do 20 years from now.

Reflection no. 4: Discourse analysis of the script

A fourth and final form of reflective exploration is a micro-analysis of a movie script excerpt. I will build a simple conversational analytic account (see Nakamura, 2010, for an explanation of conversation analysis) of a dialogue in *Dead Poets Society* where Mr. Keating and Mr. Nolan (the principal) talk about the purpose of teaching. This data analytic method offers opportunities to reflect on the interaction in terms of how language is used to co-accomplish talk as a social activity. Such an approach replicates (to some extent) 'reflecting in the moment' as Schön (1987) describes. 'Reflection-in-action' (see the opening quote to this paper for the context and inquiry) during the event is different from reflection either before or after the event. I would argue 'in the moment' reflections are largely based on actual language used and how it is organized. A script allows us to examine how the interaction unfolds turn by turn. This type of spoken discourse analysis is common in other professions (e.g., court trials and doctor-patient talk).

My interest here is in how the head administrator and a teacher talk to each other in 'polite and civil' competition to establish their own stance about education. While the institutional/professional relationship is inherently asymmetric in terms of age, experience, and position, we see through the script how Keating tries to level the playing field through quick, sharp, and witty comebacks to prior turns by Nolan. The situation is arranged for Nolan (with all due respect) to speak first and for Keating to speak in the second position (as the junior in status). However, Keating sidesteps any form of acknowledgment of what Nolan says. Any action, even a nod, could be seen as affiliation and agreement with the belief that students need to be told what to do. Instead Keating uses his turns to counter-attack. He denies the status quo by refraining from any display of agreement and instead offers a different view, which in 1959 (the year the story takes place) may have been radical: young people can be free thinkers.

Movie Script from *Dead Poets Society*: Keating (K) and Nolan (N) enter Mr. Keating's classroom.

- 1 N: This was my first classroom, John, did you know that? ((Looks at Keating's desk at the
- 2 front of the room facing the other desks)) My first desk.
- 3 K: I didn't know you taught, Mr. Nolan.
- 4 N: English. Long before your time. It was hard giving it up, I can tell you. ((Long pause))
- 5 I'm hearing rumors, John, about some unorthodox teaching methods in your classroom.
- 6 I'm not saying they had anything to do with the Dalton boy's outburst, but I don't think
- 7 I have to warn you boys his age are very impressionable.
- 8 K: Your reprimand made quite an impression I'm sure.
- 9 N: What was going on in the courtyard the other day?
- 10 K: Courtyard?
- 11 N: Boys marching, clapping in unison.
- 12 K: Oh that. That was an exercise to prove a point about the evils of conformity.
- 13 N: But John, the curriculum here is set. It's proven it works. If you question it, what is
- 14 there to prevent them from doing the same?
- 15 K: I always thought the idea of education was to learn to think for yourself.

Transcribing the talk is the first step in analyzing the discourse. Some features of the organization of turn taking emerge when we identify 'adjacency pairs' of turns. For example, Nolan asks a yes/no question in line 1. It is embedded in his explanation of what this classroom means to him, his first job. In response, Keating does not respond with the typically expected, 'No, I didn't (know)'. Instead, Keating acts/pretends as if he did not know Nolan used to be a teacher. We repeatedly see Keating use second turns to express his opinions instead of agreeing with Nolan. Out of a show of respect, the dialogue is designed so Nolan always gets the first word, but Keating gets the final word.

In a subsequent question-answer exchange, in line 9, Nolan asks about the courtyard scene. Surely, Keating heard and understood the question, but he initiates a repair of a trouble source, 'courtyard', by repeating it. He answers the question by asking another question. Again noncompliance to the grammatical design of the question allows the exchange to reveal subtle shades of stance and struggle beyond superficial answers. In line 11, Nolan is then put in the position to self-repair his question by elaborating what happened in the courtyard. Then based on the 'selective' account by Nolan, Keating is allowed a chance to comment on this activity named by Nolan. Momentarily, the roles are neatly reversed as Keating is on the offensive and Nolan has to defend.

Finally, in lines 13-14, Nolan asks a rhetorical question that 'prefers' a negative reply (e.g., 'nothing') to show affiliation (i.e., agreement) with his opinion that students should obey, not think. Once again, Keating avoids conforming to the 'recipient design' of the question that pursues and expects a certain answer in agreement or affiliation. Keating resists addressing the question and instead makes a statement of his own mission: to help students become free thinkers. It provides a sharp contrast to Nolan's way of drilling and punishing students.

Summary of what was learned

This is a sample of how the dialogue is structured to give Keating chances to show resistance to the status quo represented by Nolan's statements and questions. Raymond (2003) terms responses that do not follow the grammatical design of the interrogative form as 'non-conforming'. These are moments where the dialogue or movie script provides the hero with language and turn taking to battle the boss and the establishment or institution. Knowing when to most effectively take a turn and how to take it is an important pragmatic skill.

III. Conclusion: What do 'good' teachers do?

Teachers live for the belief that what we do matters and things will work out for students in the end (hopefully most of the time). There is a highly subjective and potentially lasting impact that teachers can make on students. Arguably, the learning experience is not exactly the same for any two students. Ironically, the true measure of the impact we have on our students may not be realized or known until years later (if at all). In real life, noticeable displays of learning (if any) have no time limit. In contrast, celluloid progress and results conveniently need to be shown as a coherent story that progresses to some kind of conclusion/result by the end of the movie or the program. What movies offer us is a visual and aural experience that can be observed and discussed. There is a clear beginning, middle, and end. The recordings are compressed and condensed (admittedly simplified and glossed) longitudinal studies/portraits of characters in action with each other.

So what do movies have to say about what 'good' teachers do? Not surprisingly perhaps, all these teachers in the movies mentioned have a clear and distinct idea of what they hope to accomplish. This idea may or may not be related to the institutionally determined curriculum. This lack of connection between test scores and learning may in fact make for a good story of going against the establishment. Dewey in *School of Rock* calls it, 'sticking it to the man'. In various ways, some subtle and some not, schools have overly constrained students from using education for self-development. In contrast, the movie teacher has a plan (for student self-discovery) and often becomes the role model for carrying it out. Often, the students represent a second chance for the teacher to make right or succeed where they might have failed in the past. They provide students with a chance to think and learn for themselves (not for others).

Given the 'right' opportunity, we are witness to the possibility of transformation through guidance. Stevick (1984) talked about the dynamic relationship between 'teacher control' and 'student initiative'. They are interlinked forces that can move up and down in the same direction or opposite directions. There is a passion and vision that all these teachers in the movies share. We observe a rise in *both* 'teacher control' and 'student initiative'. In this way, both parties become increasingly engaged in the process of learning. Whether they succeed or not is not easily defined, but in all cases we observe some form of dynamic and complex change.

'Success' is ultimately in the hands of the students and what they do with their opportunities to learn. This reminds us that the reputation of the teacher is always at stake. We cannot do the learning or motivating for our students. Our efforts to help them will be judged by how well

students do. A big question is, 'success' at doing what? There are no points for process if in the end the product (e.g., test performance) fails to live up to the billing or expectation. Maybe what teachers will realize from these cinematic examples is that there is too much attention given to showy displays of results and too little attention paid to the everyday mundane routine of studying, making mistakes, and learning from them. I will conclude this working paper with a summary outline to highlight ideas that might shed more light on what 'good' teachers do.

IV. Application: Five learning points for teachers

I list one learning point from each of the reflective practices (1-4). The points serve as reminders of common sense rather than new innovative teaching methods.

Reflection no. 1: A student of film

Movies by their very design and purpose are made for people to share in a common visual experience. Discussion is a common way to enrich the viewing experience. Sharing experiences helps us make connections among past, present, and future actions. Thus, our teaching has greater relevance when we build a vision of the future through past observations and new understandings. Building a clear sense of continuity in our professional development expands our resources.

Reflection no. 2: Categorizing movies

Grouping movies by characteristics such as struggles and issues, allows us to delve below the surface of simple observation. Not all movies aim for the same audience or message. Being able to differentiate movies by their intention and message heightens our awareness of the range of contexts that teachers encounter. Each class is a unique community with distinct beliefs, values, and assumptions. Such factors help shape the particular joint project that students and a teacher as a group undertake. Institutionally students and teachers are brought together. It is up to us what happens.

Reflection no. 3: Through the eyes of the participants

We can broaden our acceptance and deepen understanding of the social dynamics and the complexity at play in each encounter by seeing things in a different light or lights. There is no single absolutely correct position to take that works every time. Taking into account more than our own limited perception helps us to see the bigger picture. Things previously unnoticed or incomprehensible may begin to make sense when we see other priorities that are equally valid for other parties. Teachers' actions are ultimately held accountable to multiple parties (e.g., students, teachers, parents, administrators) beyond ourselves. Are these beliefs mutually inclusive or exclusive? Is a general consensus possible among the parties involved?

Reflection no. 4: Discourse analysis of the script

Question-response exchanges are one of the most common conversational methods to impart knowledge and also to assess it. Institutionally, many talks between administrator and teacher,

teacher and student, and even parent and child are inherently asymmetrical in terms of power, rights, and obligations. However, there are subtle ways to resist authority. Not conforming to the form of the questions asked is one of them. Do we teach students how to use language to express one's stance or opinion? Grammar preserves language through a stable set of rules whereas pragmatics and sociocultural details show us how to interact through language. I believe that studying details of movies about teachers and their teaching helps us make what Dewey (as pointed out by Zeichner and Liston, 1996) calls a critical and potentially profound distinction between 'action that is routine and action that is reflective' (p. 9). The routine comes from tradition and authority while reflection comes from observation and reconsideration. By recognizing the difference, we may find new and fresh ways to teach.

Teachers who have heard that they should avoid matters foreign to pupils' experience, are frequently surprised to find pupils wake up when something beyond their ken is introduced, while they remain apathetic in considering the familiar.

(John Dewey, 1910, p. 221)

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge the influence of the late film critic Roger Ebert. His reviews consistently displayed deep understanding in an engaging style that articulated details and issues well beyond what the average viewer would ever notice. See Chicago Sun-Times, rogerebert.com, for his archive of articles.

References

- Allwright, D. & Bailey, K. (1990). *Focus on the language classroom: An introduction to classroom research for language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, K. (1990). 'The use of diary studies in teacher education programs'. In J. C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.). *Second language teacher education* (pp. 215-226). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dewey, J. (1910/1997). *How we think*. Boston: Heath & Co./ New York: Dover Publications.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. & Anderson, M. (2011). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (third edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999). *Storylines: Craftartists' narratives of identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nakamura, I. (2012). 'Reflections on learning from a study leave: One year later'. *Bulletin of Higher Education Okayama University*, Vol. 8, 151-161.
- Raymond, G. (2003). 'Grammar and social organization: Yes/no interrogatives and the structure of responding'. *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 68, No. 6, 939-967.
- Robinson, K. (2012). *The element: How finding your passion changes everything*. London: Penguin.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Stevick, E. (1980). *Teaching languages: A way and ways*. Rowley, MA: Newberry House.

Zeichner, K. M. & Liston, D. P. (1996). *Reflective practice: An introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Author

Ian Nakamura, a professor in the Language Education Center, uses movies not only for professional development and reflective practice, but also as a learning/teaching medium in his classes. Movies engage students in language through memorable illustrations of social interactions in interesting local settings. Movies add another dimension to the learner's experience by showing how interactions are accomplished through language. For more information: iannaka@okayama-u.ac.jp.

